7 Nights at the Sutton's

Collected Poems

Scott Spearly

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Scott Spearly is an American songwriter and musician best known for his musical exploits with his primitive string band *The Knuckle Dusters*. He has also written and produced original songs and instrumental music spanning ten albums: *Low-Country Radio (2014), Far From the Herd (2014), You're a Cancer (2016), Pull the Plug (2017), Where the Waters Never Reach (2019 with Dave Sims), Walkin' Dog (2019), My Car Won't Go (2020), Animal Control (2021), Satisfy Myself (2023), and The Old Punks (2025 with Dave Sims).* Scott earned his English degree with a writing emphasis from Penn State University in 1993 studying poetry under John Haag, and Scott's close friendship with *Steel Living* author Gerald Musinsky proved instrumental in the shaping and development of his own writing style. In 1998 Scott received his Master's Degree in Education from Shippensburg University, specializing in behavioral disorders and serving students with emotional needs, and he worked as a public educator for 25 years building educational programs in rural south central Pennsylvania.

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7 Nights at the Sutton's

Another Paradise Lost

It's the last stop
for mom and pop.
All of the other honky-tonks
closed their doors for good,
selling out liquor licenses
to corporate convenience.
Americans in the Keystone state
blindly trade jukeboxes
and wooden-walled
dim-lit ambiance
for Sheetz *Shmuffins*
and Rutter's fried
chicken tenders.

Maybe they've rid themselves
of the pool tables
and smoke-stained ceilings,
the loudmouth at the end of the bar,
but what have they gained after
feeding their fat faces
and guzzling cars
with fuel and adult
slushies?

This is *not* a new enterprise.
Since the dawn of the automobile
mom and pop bars were built
on every mountain top.
That's where your car overheated.
You got out while it cooled,
the wife used the bathroom,
candy for the kids,
dad got a cold beer
and a few minutes
of solace.

At *The Sutton's* in Hawk Run
truckers, miners, loggers
might now smoke outside
but behind the bar
between the taps and six-packs,
between the dollar bills
and cash register, between
the liquor bottles, pickled eggs,
and hot-bologna
is a nice round ass
and welcoming smile,
without a stupid red & yellow hat
or plastic name tag.

Drink Tickets

I was sold on this place
when I got my first.
YOU HAVE ONE COMING
it reads, and come to find out
there are tiers...
colors that correspond
to budgets and status.

A pale green ticket
spells out BEER
if that's what a jolly
patron has bought you
and your bottle is
not yet empty,
a reminder of old drinking
manners, reciprocity,
kindnesses lost
in this card-swiping
debit era.

A Pepto-Bismol pink one
equals a RAIL DRINK.
One of the drunks hit
a pull-tab out of the bowl
for fifty dollars,
bought everybody a round,
and since Old Crow
bourbon & ginger
is his choice, well,
you've been upgraded.

The last ticket is printed
on goldenrod stock...
sitting in a wooden box
below the lone window
in this joint, sun-faded
because nobody can afford
the ink which specifies
TOP-SHELF: Cuervo,
Maker's Mark, Beefeaters.
Even if you had the money,
buying one screams
I'm from out-of-town
and don't belong here.

Rival Districts

These two boys,
Brian and Taylor,
spying the bandaged hand
I ran a power saw through
remodeling my sister's bathroom
asked me to shoot pool.
In an age where kids
do not care
to get their drivers license at 16,
whose parents pay
their data plans,
to whom cash denominations
are foreign, these two
twenty-somethings,
a young union carpenter
and a track-hoe operator,
had the mindfulness
to invite an old man
to shoot.

At this mountaintop mecca
of blue-collar drop-outs,
the lean trade school studs
seemed worthy of diplomas
earned from rural
rivaling districts.
I like these boys.
It's hard not to be reminded
of my former self.
After a discussion
and clarification of the house rules,
in tandem I kindly
kicked their asses
all over the table.

“How'd it go?”
jested another white-hair at the bar.
“School is closed,” I replied.
He stood up and took his change
and drink to the back room,
to further teach the youth
about *the old guys*
and the truths
to which we cling.

Venison Soup

The colostomy bag on the guy
the next bar stool over
is leaking...

I don't know how to tell him
other than to tell him.

Rather than talk about
the cause of his guts
and fecal matter spilling
below to the brass footrest,
instead he tells tales
of a friend who
had a stroke, how therapy
helped his ailing buddy
use a walker more efficiently
after only three months
treatment.

Meanwhile,
Steven Seagal
is on the corner TV
opening up a can
of wannabe-Japanese
Anglo American Jew *whoop-ass*
on some poor criminal
underworld stooge,
and it's unanimous
across the bar –
the bad guy
had it coming.

Diversions wait
for us all.

Bar Hazards

On a humid late afternoon
a cool bar with wooden
screen doors on both sides
is no place to run from...

the air moves serpentine
through the stools
blowing around coasters
and giving wind to otherwise
stagnant lives.

My sister
lives 100 paces from this dive.
Layla the daytime tender
has a lighter
and spoon habit,
she warns.

If that nodding barmaid
opens the glass case too quick
a teetering *Coors Light* pounder
is gonna hit the floor...

I should warn her,
but it's slow in here today.
Crystalline, the sultry
Princess of Darkness,
doesn't clock-in
until after 9 p.m.
and I'm bored.

Check the time.
I have it to kill.
A brown stubby
bottle of beer,
a shot of Crown Royal
to sip. Rinse.
Repeat.

The screen door
slams as I exit,
a Silver Bullet
drops and sprays
what I left behind –
three wet dollar bills,
two quarters,
and emptiness.

I Am The
Princess of Darkness

an unusual slithery treasure
in these rural parts, see my vertical
linear gothic neck-down ink
sadist beauty tight dreadlocks
elbow joints that twist and
bend here \\\ ///// drop way down
with form _ __ or formlessness,
Athena & / aunt Lily Munster
Medusa & \-- Morticia Addams
total sex {=} and sin painful
pleasure is −/ / now submit
a drink poured _- -/ sip as I say
let it run down my navel,
surrounding colors. Ah.. Yes..!
Chances are you will feel me
come, crawling inside
bleeding out desires.
Maybe before twelve
you were young childlike
with curious eyes you saw,
you remember 1980, the punk
mohawks, black leather, gay bars,
& the same metal piercings, my skin,
my tongue, my nose, around my ears,
curves with tattoos, freckles, pointed
nipples and bras and lace & beads. I
was the ugly girl more often
than I wanted to be, hurt,
turned me on pretty bad,
wild. Now you're
a grown man and
you want to know
me, because cash
and liquor mingle
between hands; no
my brain and body
won't succumb easy
to out-of-town looks
even from handsome
straight-up, plain, boring
Wally Cleaverish looking
chumps. I am not a statue
for ogling and glaring. Art
might be found midsection
just below my intersection
of Hollywood & Vine. Or
it may be you'll remember
riding me like your bike.

Bingo or Bust

No pussy to be had,
that is the essence
and nature of old age,
the country dive.
The Sutton's is no different –
but that's not why
you frequent these shit-holes.

You don't expect
an unmarried
young and dumb
to waltz in the door
and sit on your lap.

Now, if it's a gray-haired
widow you favor,
the neighbor's elderly mom
having her Thursday
boilermaker before the 6 o'clock
potluck bingo
at the Carpathian Club,
well, *she's giving you the eyes
isn't she?*

You don't dismiss
her warmth. Friendliness
gleams. Kindness needs
no introduction.

Vacation Poems

All Inclusive

You wonder what happens
on the other side of these walls
and gates. Buddha was curious
of the same from inside his palace.
The wine, the orgies, the silk
and potent teas are not
enough to satisfy
true longing.

If three Dominicans
ride piggyback
on a motorcycle to work,
is that suffering?
Ramshackle scaffolding
tells the story,
half built hotels
with leaning columns
and windows askew,
risks poor tradesmen take
balanced high on skinny planks,
to lift and lay each block
for new palaces where
you pay to be the prince.

There is such a thing
as too much time
in your own head.
Some days there are not enough
ocean waves or whitecaps
to carry all of its contents away.
Paradise is indeed
a state of mind
and not a place.
At least not this place.

Surf-Rake

Where you're from
you are used to seeing hay balers
and other mechanized
farm equipment.
Here they bale seaweed
and drag it off into the bush,
or whatever they call the thick
swath of shrubs, dwarf trees,
and coconut palms the laborers
clear between resorts
with their machetes.

This coastal tip is absent of life
except for kelp. It's odd
to walk a beach and find
only fragments of glass and tile,
bottle caps. Where the waves
left them on a knoll above high tide
two tiny conical shells
are camouflaged in the sand,
the last signs of living
in this washed up
civilization.

Seals on a Rock

The sun is at your back
and looking up and down the coast
its hard to believe in 1960
S-O-M-E-O-N-E was here
visioning people, resorts,
walls, and exclusive
packages.

Someone from cold New York
with Jeffery Epstein-like
hedge fund money,
and whores,
thought to privately
colonize this land
for all foreigners.

You're one of those,
a patron of travel like this,
flying 2000 miles
from a dot along the eastern
United States to a place
fat-bellied and wrinkly humans
gather around the pool
like seals on rock,
ignoring the steady power
of blowing wind,
breaking waves,
and the storm
at the ocean's edge.

Down Beach

Your wife hates you...

Somehow you are on
separate vacations
in the same room,
between her days of sun
at the pool and your
long excursions on foot.
Chronically she's packing
and unpacking bags,
and not just bags,
but bags within
bags. Opening,
closing, zipping,
shutting, putting things in
and taking things out
of bags.

Meanwhile down beach
in this tropical water
a topless woman
just took her tits
for a swim.
Bikini after bikini
walks by speaking
in foreign tongues.
To them, your tongue
is foreign.
The brown German
lesbians next to you
in their tube tops
are leaving to the room...
to the room...
calling all oily
and sandy babes
to the room.

Shimmy & Kick

There is an Italian couple
two loungers over
with their tanned bodies
and sandy feet
facing west,
the woman
rounded and attractive
runs her nails and fingertips
across the man's shoulder
over and over,
caressing,
and when she stops
his hand holds hers,
softly he talks to his
wife... lover (?)
about dinner,
or their kids back home
in the land of prosciutto,
popes, and Chianti –
through his tortoise glasses
the palms sway
behind the hotel
gentle as the lovers'
own motions.

Some gypsy girls
just walked by
in g-stringed micro-bikinis,
one with an ass
like a wrestler,
the other with a polite
side-to-side
shimmy and kick.

Broken Tongue

Olga will not be happy
with the drunk condition
this room left you in.

She put flowers
on the shower threshold,
and at the foot of your bed
on a blanket she shaped
like a bow-tie.

Mother of two,
Embra and Barron,
she has lived here
todos sus anos,
with your broken Spanish
the best you can understand
she stays in the mountains
when on holiday.

The young men who stock
the liquor in the rooms
stay close by when she cleans.
At first you think the male company
is by design, a precaution
against preying white Americans.
She cleans, they stock,
no one gets molested.

Your wife says Olga likes you.
Maybe its because your broken tongue
still allows you to make
a Dominican woman smile,
to know the names
and ages of her kids,
sus hijos.

You leave her money,
but you're certain it's NOT
why she smiles at you.
The stock boys hang around
because like you
they favor Olga.
Tomorrow you will be sure
not to track sand
across the room.

Ostrich Legs

The first and only
last chance to get laid
by an attractive Dominican
woman just came
and left...

she was on the 1st floor
with her cart
and ignored you
as you went up 3 flights
quickly – because you
have the legs
of an ostrich.

Inside your room
to cool off
you undress
and hear a knock...

"un momento por favor"
you holler. The door
opens itself and there
is the woman from the 1st floor
with her all-access
keycard.

"E-v-er-y thing o-kay?"
her brown slender body asks
with a bottle of spray cleaner
in her left hand. It may be
the only English
she knows...

you say "yes, *bien*, good, *gracias*"
and you cannot be any more direct
standing before her
in your underwear.

She asks again
"E-v-er-y thing o-kay?"

"Yes, *si, todo bien*, *gracias*"
and you close the door slowly
on her disappointment.

One of the 1st phrases
you learn in high school Spanish
is *cierra la puerta* – close the door,
and *abre la puerta* – open
the door.

Tomorrow,
if she knocks again,
you will holler
abre la puerta senora!

You'll tell her
“no, e-v-er-y thing
is not o-kay,”
ayuda me por favor.
Help me,
please.

Message to the Dog Sitter

Looks like 62 degrees
back home this coming Friday...
better get Mr. T-Bone
out walking on the leash.
He can handle
to Crazy Eddie's house
and back. Keep his parts
moving.

He also likes to be asked,
“Do you want to take out the trash?”
or
“Do you want to walk down
to the studio?”

Mr. T-Bone is used to hearing
all of his object vocabulary
put into sentences,
the more puzzling
and confounding to him
the better.

If you ask him
“Do you want to have your
supper in the shower?”
he will lose
his little doggie mind.

Your son reports a warm breeze
compared to the 26 degrees
and snow when you left;
while feeding your
wife's feral cats
Mr. T-Bone milled about
the backyard.

“Watch him” you reply.
This is when he's crafty
and behind your back
eats cat shit.
He'll duck, dodge,
zig-zag, and refuse
to go back in the house
until he is done chewing
such a delicacy.

From the Air

The tarmac is blistering hot
and these hardworking mulatto
men and women are in long sleeves
and reflective chartreuse vests.
The bags go on. Over the intercom
the stewardess reminds us all the captain
has turned on the fasten-seat-belt sign.
The no-smoking light is always on,
in the 1960's carriers did not mind
two-hundred passengers
lighting up a smoke
atop 50,000 gallons
of high octane fuel.

On the way in
near the split between
the Haitian and Dominican coastline,
through the small oval window
you spy what you think is your
tropical destination.
But you were wrong –
another 20 minutes by air
the plane drops tail to nose,
incrementally, like a leaf back home
falling from a tree, which is better
than landing straight down
like a coconut
from a palm.

From the air you cannot see
the trash on the highways,
the sweaty construction workers
piled in the bed of a pickup,
the tin roof pallet-walled shanties,
or the poor lingering
at the corner market.
On the return, Punta Cana
to Pittsburgh, there is no need
to de-ice the plane for departure.
There are no snow drifts
below, no trees without leaves
or white-capped mountains.

Instead sandy rural roads rise from
slave labor plantations
where hard men, desperate women,
and child labor work
the cocoa and sugar cane fields,
then climb up through the mountains
uniformly plush as moss.

The green waters, beaches,
and cliffs fade from sight...
3 hours of ocean passing below
then northwest across the Carolinas
and Virgina is the airy path
back to your frigid home.

What Are They Catching?

You keep looking down at the clouds below
trying to make out shapes
and likenesses... maybe a billowy
Teddy Roosevelt, who you imagine
had he traveled here on
his horse, by steamship,
would chart and map the terrain
like the Amazon. But he's not here,
you keep looking as you gain altitude
but the only forms you see all resemble
fried calamari.

Down at the ocean's surface
boats crisscross trolling
for durado, tuna, sailfish,
bonita and wahoo,
or maybe they're trapping
the Caribbean lobsters
your wife butchered at the table
with her fork the last three nights.
A boat captain hollers
“hold the lines, pull up, reel down!”
as a *turista* on the charter vessel
yells back “look, a plane taking off!”
and in the clouds finally you see
his big fish that got away.

An Increase in Tolls

You hate this fucking turnpike.
Three hours by plane
and the tropics become
an Appalachian winter
wasteland.
It will take the wheels
of your old truck equal that time
to pass through the Squirrel Hill
tunnels, with no time to stop
for a Mineo's pizza...
Monroeville, New Stanton,
Donegal and the rest
of the rural grey lifeless towns
between Pittsburgh's three rivers
and Breezewood,
the keystone state's
mecca of gasoline
and fast food.

From there the terrain climbs
over three mountains,
the old Lincoln Highway
over Sideling Hill
and through Buchanan
state forest.
Someone should tell
the Dominicans about
the failured American president
this swath of woods
was named after,
who let war
slip through the back door,
unchecked.

Here it was grains
and cotton crops. Down there
150 years later, today, now,
it's cocoa and sugar cane.
Here it was the whip.
On the island it's automatic
weapons on horseback,
and no cavalry is coming
to fight the world army
of teetotalers and confectioners.
Children in servitude...
a lifetime of tolls
with no exits.

Discrepancies

Your wife gets mad
when you call her Olga.
You keep thinking of her thick
thighs and those cotton seersucker
housekeeping get-ups
the hospitality
workers wear.

Your wife also says
service workers in Punta Cana
make three-hundred
dollars a month.
Our villa had 12 rooms
overlooking the pool
just steps away from where
the waves of the Atlantic
break at the southern tip
near the Caribbean Sea.
Your wife leaves Olga
two dollars. You leave her five.
7 dollars times 7 days,
49 dollars for a week
of turning the sheets,
sanitizing the floors
and toilet.

Twelve rooms multiplied
by a week in paradise equals
five-hundred and eighty-eight
dollars – times four weeks
you come up with
$2352 a month cash.
Maybe your villa neighbors
were less than generous.

Despite discrepancies
you don't think it was your gratuity
Olga liked. Maybe it was more
your gracious smile, like hers,
warm and familiar,
a common energy,
the kindness two strangers
from worlds far apart
find in conversation
limited by, of all things,
language.

White Boy Buddha

Right Action

It's always you young
skinny squirrels with a walnut
larger than your brain
clenched between your teeth
who end up biting it
for good.

Don't pause on the yellow line
for the oncoming vehicle,
RUN... it is the only
and most immediate
choice.

You lack the experience
of the chubby park squirrels,
smart enough to forage
away from the morning
commute,

or to bob and weave
with acute timing
between turning wheels
of the 3500 pound machine
grazing the fine fur
of your head.

You lack the girth
to roll with the tires
and sustain a hit,
to return intact to the nest
you left at dawn
in your own hurry
of blind eagerness.

Right Concentration

Don't do last night's dishes
while preparing your
breakfast – the sage
sausage goes dry,
eggs fry hard,
toast gets cold
and rubbery.

Focus on the task at hand,
don't distract yourself
with the bright sun
melting snow outside
your window.

Stand over your eggs,
watch them,
flip when the time is right.
A hard egg deprives you
the artistry of not
breaking any yolks.

Right Effort

Wrong word.
Tibetan monks
should reconvene
and concede,
right RESTRAINT
in the face of so much
sensory stimulation
is noble.

Sight in the womb
we're deprived.
Mother's musical
heartbeat, tiny
perfect fingers,
salty amniotic fluid,
liquid scents
we know.

From the time
we are light blinded
to our last breath
the seconds, minutes,
hours, days we measure
in-between inundate
our peripheries,
vibrate our stapes,
tempt us with fragrance,
arouse with a kiss
or caress,
and intoxicate
the tongue with sweet,
sour, tender
and spicy.

Any effort to fight
falls short. We diet
and abstain, deprive
ourselves of binges
and whims,
moderate,
learn to let the wind
carry and forgive
our lapses
and failures.

Right View

Spanky and Darla,
Buckwheat
and Alfalfa too
saw the pragmatism
in each day,

flowers and slingshots,
songs sung off key,
comedic miniature adults
in knickers and
shingle bob haircuts
find the middle way
between 80
and 8 year old
extremes...

even Petey
could see the world
clearly through the hairy
circle around his eye,
and Stymie (?)
from the beginning
knew he'd be
buried in that derby.

Right Livelihood

No beef jerky
unless you slaughtered,
marinated, dried it
yourself...
meat, liquor, poisons
all seem necessary
till the uric acid
crystallizes in your
throbbing toe.

Don't be a king.
A plush velvet robe
can only wrap
so much fat...
in your damp castle
the prince lives lean
on vegetables and
sex with the maidens.

Right Mindfulness

The dog with his head out the window
frontloading scents in an olfactory
rush of sensory receptors
ignores the strong mind
as well as the weak.
Neither exist giving over
to the moment.

No battle. No dichotomy.
Obliteration of yin
and yang, bliss absent
of opposites.

Nervousness before the journey
gives way to the wonder
of not knowing
the destination.
There is only leaving
and arrival
wrapped in oneness,
respite and escape
are not smells.

Right Speech

often means less,
sometimes none...

a colorful word tapestry
is no match

for simple speaking,
a pumping heart,

intent...
convey honesty

and love in the exchange
of symbols and phonemes,

enemy or friend
be brief, do what you say,

don't waste or lose
truth in babble.

Right Resolve

You open the door
and let the knocking
problem in...
you entertain,
laugh, argue,
tire of stumping...
exhausted your guest
exits from the rear,
again at the front a knock.

You open the door
and let the pounding
problem in...
you listen, nod,
affirm the gripes
and pains...
when passions
and upheavals die down
you hug with goodbye.

You return
to the front threshold
and wait. No knock.
You ponder, curious
of the absence
and silence...
crossing over
you close the door
and finally leave
your home
behind.

Bits & Pieces

She Once Lived On Ice

You are missing it...
because now the cold makes you tremble
and the night is foreign to you.

The ground is frozen hard,
frost grass needles
break beneath the feet...
an echo of owls
call & holler above
the running coyotes,
a neighbor's distant dogs
sound the alert.

You sleep...
while the full moon illuminates the tree tops
and the 2 a.m. silhouette
of the mountain line.

You are missing
the quiet beneath it all...
the thin winter air,
senses acute.

But mostly
the sharing is what you are missing,
those things you once knew,
love and solace.

When will you wake?

Dumped *(for Damari Perry)*

You brought me into this world
and took me out with the trash.

You bruised my bones.
The coroner said my organs
were half-frozen.

I was naked in a garbage bag
and charred.

Abandoned like the house
where you dumped me
hypothermia set in...
to cure that you
set me on fire.
I was too cold to burn.

The police came,
you blamed my older sister
for dragging me up north
and passing out at a party.
When she sobered
the story was that somehow
I vanished, or got abducted
on the long sub-zero walk
back to Chicago.

I am six...
I can barely say
Chi-ca-go
without the phonemes and my own
childish slobber
building up in my mouth
and twisting in my cheeks.
I would've corrected that
in kindergarten,
mom.

My Little Dick Gets Cold

...when more than six
inches of snow sticks,
doing my business
as you call it
is no fun, I'm too close
to the ground.

Like over here...
a crust of ice along the bank
has me falling over
when I lift my leg,
my tiny toenails lose grip
and I slip,
down I go.

And when I squat? *What?*
You cleared a path for me?
Only a human...
for millennia man and wolf
have been scratching
for each other.

So, I crab-crawl
and *do my business...*
I raise my nose when done
and fail to kick up
the frozen dirt behind me, we race
for the warmth of the wood stove
where the steady heat holds us
until the next interval.

Sixth Sense

When my human gets home
I wont be so alone.

Where does he go?

I've been sitting at
this window
on the back of the couch
watching...

Mary across the way
waddles her fat ass
down the walk
to the mailbox...

the brakes screech
on the postal jeep
when it drives by...

the preacher and his dog
jog between his house
and the church...

the scent of my master
keeps fading.

Tweakers...

stole your catalytic converter
and the manhole cover
by Sugar High Bakery
and took it to the scrap
recyclers for cash...

they returned to the hippie farm
with beer, where teen dopers
live for free as “house boys”
for the old landowner
who milks morning
and night

skinny pale
fringe drop-outs
long ago molested
by family...

users now
only to cope
with advantages taken,
their routines
of theft and fixes,
farm cooked
brews,
hot tub mixes
stirred in the master
bathroom on the 2nd floor...

quiet public knowledge
nobody speaks of
short of barroom gossip
and locking up
garages and car doors
with each filthy
sunset.

Kitchen Dweller

A plague of black flies
has infested this house
since you left,

I don't understand.
The kitchen stays clean.
I no longer eat.

One bag of trash
is all I accumulate,
bottles mostly

and a few candy bar wrappers,
hardly a breeding ground
for the buzzing little pests.

The electric bill has gone down,
and for the first time
above the stove I hear

each annoying tick of the clock.
The loneliness we shared in parallel
was never this quiet.

This is the dish I have served.

Letter to Bella

I am sorry about Riggo.
You weren't there to see
the burial in his little
Redskins jersey,
or the small pine board
box the neighbor built
right after he shot him.

But you heard
Riggo wail the night before,
crying out between vomiting
and delirium – staggering.
The distress is still
in your own gray face.

You lost the friend
who showed you how
to clean each last savory
lick from the tin can
you'd free from the trash
and carry in your mouth
for visitors to marvel
at your prize.

Riggo was on borrowed time.
On my own way home
more than 9 times
he escaped vehicular homicide
crossing the road returning
from the hunt.

Cancer does not discriminate
between species,
not even for a feline-loving
retriever like you.

Nothing to See Here

Rednecks burn trash
at night, black tire smoke
billows beneath the stars.
Stray shards of broken
vinyl siding, plastic bags,
2 liter Pepsi bottles
and used feminine hygiene
products all rise
with yesterday's
bacon grease.

Coagulated embers fall.
Oils drip to the rotten
metal barrel bottom,
toxic scents
lost in sleep,
gone before
the neighbors
wake.

No wiser,
township supervisors
ride rural roads
with mugs of morning coffee
checking head walls
and squash pipes,
drains and downed tree limbs,
the day bright and green
as every day
before.

R.I.P. – Power of Myth

stop killing bears
asshole

you are fucking up
the spirit world
with your empty
30-06

someone's uncle
in Kaleria
is dead a 2nd time
because of you

the Inuit ask
what did you offer

before the hunt
or the photo-op
with the seven
hundred and 17
mythic pounds

no longer
walking the forest
rustling leaves
between berry
bushes

elder Japanese
tell a tale

of a startled woman
who ran off without
her Ainu child
the villagers

returned to find
a bear
their manifestation
of god
babysitting
in the meadow

at the weigh station
did you reflect

when the dial spun
past 300
400
500

about your actions
or the last steamy
breath
taken

will you keep the skull
and bring offerings

to the taxidermist
or text your buddies
and tell them
not to come
with the atv

so in the frozen dark
you can sleep under
the warm carcass
of your once-in-a-lifetime
kill

The North Bend

back in '90
my blues-laden
mountain dwelling
outlaw friend
served me a pickle
and hot dog
omelet

morning sun
over the Susquehanna
crossed the railroad tracks
to a ratty porch couch
piercing the eyelids
glued to my hungover
head

a 2 year old girl
pried open my eyes
with an action-figure arm
her older brother yanked
from a flappy box
of broken
toys

cowboy days
potatoes seared
in the black cast iron
skillet

a seasoning of Son House
Skip James
and Blind Lemon
wafted over the breath
of last night's tequila
and the stale backwash
left in Iron City
pounders

masking the stench
of ashtray butts
Camel non-filters
from the pull knob
cigarette machine
beside the dartboard
in the old hotel
along Young Womans
creek

formative times
glory days of booze
wild discovery
and for my friend
hurt

past is known
present we endure
out loud and to ourselves
the future we
wonder

but if I could leave now
I would go there
backwards against
this one-way
time-marching
if only to sense
again

the lightness
of a folded egg
tart little gherkins
salty pig parts
the twang of delta blues
and the clanks of a midnight
train.

Icebox Blues

You won't find what
you're looking for in the fridge
tonight. The mayonnaise
and stray lemon bumping
against the milk jug,
an open can of buffalo gravy
designer dog food
illuminated
by the appliance bulb
sucks in your stare,
white and hard
as the leftover rice
from the Chinese meal
you ate two days ago
alone.

Spongy potatoes in the drawer
and a stick of butter in the top tray
live like tiered prisoners
who never see each other.
Bare glass shelves
turn your eyes
to the traffic jam
of Heinz 57, dijon mustard,
soy sauce, dill pickles
and black olives,
salad dressings out of date...
the Pepto-Bismol
or Milk of Magnesia on the door
won't alleviate
the knot in your stomach
or this particular
hunger.

At this hour it feels
like your life is an emptiness
of condiments,
no cold fried chicken,
no sandwich lunch meat
or home cooked goodness
to nuke, nothing
sweet to snack on.
A wobbly plastic vodka bottle
down low next to the fishing worms
tells the story
of failure.

September Winds

Fall leaves swirl
from the souls who just left
their hospital beds
or trapped cars,
from the couches
alleys or bars
where their bodies
were shot, murdered.

Death is more
some months than others.
Parents, friends,
the boys who drowned
in the high creek,
the suspects in the article
unnamed...

to what realm they go
agnostics don't know,
and neither does
anyone else.

Purgatory sure is
a strange notion,
but maybe some
belong in this
figment.

Hell seems right,
vindictive,
perhaps justifiable
in judgment
if we weren't already
living it.

Heaven, the pearly
gates, meeting Jesus
and dead relatives
watching over us
reassuring (?)
creepy.

On this we can agree –
in the ground is mostly
where they go,
terra firma,
or wind-scattered across
an ocean home.

Fire Under Glass

When they ask
what finally drove him over
the edge
you can tell them
it was a lack of tube
amplifiers.

It wasn't enough
he had all the right full-range
and mid-range
speakers,

a solid-state
public address head
salvaged from a roll-off
dumpster behind the high school
renovation,

wired and measured
with ohms,
cable resistances
and mojo,

or a custom paisley
cloth cabinet cased
with the same board
and batten lumber
leftover from his lonely
log cabin...

he knew music was in there,
but in the end
his own sum was not
greater
than his parts.